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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT INCREASING ACCESS TO METHADONE TREATMENT

Investing $2 Million To Improve Treatment For People With Opioid Addictions

TORONTO- The McGuinty government is increasing access to methadone maintenance treatment for people with opioid addictions by investing an additional $2 million in treatment initiatives across Ontario, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Our government is committed to providing better treatment for people who are addicted to heroin and other opioids," said Smitherman. "This new funding will allow for continuous improvement of professional services and increase awareness in communities about the value of methadone maintenance treatment."

The $2 million announced today will be allocated to improve methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) in Ontario as follows:

- $1 million to recruit more doctors to prescribe methadone and other treatments, expand training and professional supports at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and develop best practice guidelines for nurses, counsellors and pharmacists
- $200,000 to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to enhance enforcement of best practice guidelines and quality assurance initiatives related to methadone services
- $500,000 to increase public awareness regarding the benefits of MMT and issues related to opioid dependence.
- $300,000 to develop a resource guide to assist in the proper introduction of MMT into local communities including the funding of local "Citizen Engagement Committees"

This brings the province's annual total funding for MMT initiatives to $4.3 million.

After having consulted with experts in the field, the government intends to finalize changes to the OHIP fee codes that govern payment for testing performed in physician's offices related to methadone maintenance programs. This move will provide greater accountability and help to eliminate unnecessary testing and is expected to save approximately $3 million per year.

In April 2006, the government created the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Practices Task Force to provide advice on access to methadone, best practices and training, payment models, quality assurance and assessment, and community engagement. As part of today's announcement the government also released the *Report of the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Practices Task Force* which outlines 26 recommendations directed at all key stakeholders involved in methadone maintenance treatment in the province.

"We want to thank the task force members for their hard work, analysis and dedication in participating in the Task Force and for lending their collective expertise to this important matter," said Smitherman. "The government is working with stakeholders to implement several of the recommendations."

"We are pleased the government is taking action on the recommendations of the Task Force report by increasing access to methadone treatment for people with opioid addictions," said Anton Hart, Chair of the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Practices Task Force.

It is estimated that the social, economic and health care costs of untreated opioid addictions exceeds $1 billion including lost productivity and premature mortality along with costs associated with law enforcement and the use of the criminal justice system.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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